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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 06 BAGHDAD 003811

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SUBJECT: COUNTERING HOSTAGE-TAKING IN IRAQ

Classified By: Political Military Minister-Counselor Michael H. Corbin
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. Embassy Baghdad's Office of Hostage Affairs
(OHA) has provided critical support to the Embassy and MNF-I
in the recovery of hostages captured by a multitude of
criminal/insurgent organizations in Iraq. Formed in 2004 as
the Hostage Working Group (HWG), OHA has three primary roles:
kidnap prevention, hostage recovery, and pursuing justice for
the criminals and insurgents who commit these crimes. Within
the Embassy, OHA is the lead office on hostage issues, and
coordinates the efforts of the Department of Justice (DOJ)
and other Embassy elements as well as Multi-National Force
Iraq (MNF-I). OHA also coordinates with the Government of
Iraq (GOI), including the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry
of Defense, and the Counter Terrorism Bureau.

¶2. (S) The improving security situation in Iraq brings with
it a new set of challenges and potential vulnerabilities. As
U.S. officials, private entrepreneurs, and non-governmental
organization staff expand their operations in Iraq and
interact more frequently with the Iraqi population, they will
become more susceptible to kidnapers and insurgents seeking
easy targets. The USG will continue to need a means to
respond should this occur. Moreovoer, Iraq requires a
comprehensive approach to mitigate the economic, social, and
security impact of kidnapping. This will require involvement
and buy-in from the highest levels of the GOI and should
involve standing up a dedicated hostage recovery capability
within the government. END SUMMARY.

Introduction to the Hostage Problem in Iraq

¶3. (SBU) Kidnapping in Iraq for political, sectarian, or
financial gain has proven to be an effective technique for
insurgent, terrorist and criminal elements since late 2003.
Hostage takers have been successfully utilizing kidnappings
to fund terrorist and other illicit activities, create civil
unrest, erode the legitimacy of the GOI, generate propaganda,
garner media attention, and to push for political concessions
from non-Western countries. Kidnappings have slowed
reconstruction, delayed economic development, and undermined
efforts to establish a Rule of Law and restore human rights
and civil liberties to the people of Iraq.

¶4. (SBU) According to Iraqi police statistics, before the
improved security situation beginning late summer of 2008,
85% of the kidnappings were sectarian in nature; with the
stabilizing security environment, the Iraqis believe this has
reversed to approximately 85% of kidnappings being criminal
in nature. At the height of the kidnapping problem, it is
estimated that there were between 40-50 kidnappings a day in
the Baghdad area alone.   Current estimates for the Baghdad
area are between 10-15 kidnappings per month. Statistics for
outlying regions vary tremendously depending on the source of

the data, definitions utilized by the collecting entity, and trends of community reporting to GOI or Coalition Forces at the time of data collection; reporting such numbers is not a reliable gauge of existing kidnap trends without extensive research and statistical analysis.

¶5. (S/REL TO USA, MCFI) Within the last several months there has been increase in reporting regarding the kidnapping of children. OHA has received reports of four child kidnap events in the past two months, only two of which are known to Qevents in the past two months, only two of which are known to have been resolved successfully. Iraqi police state this is a low-risk, high return venture for the criminal elements and attribute the rapid payment of ransoms to the emotional trauma endure by the hostages, families.   Initial ransom demands appear to range from USD 250,000 to USD 100,000 for a child. Of the cases OHA has observed, the ransoms have been negotiated to under USD 20,000 and paid within a two-week period or less.

¶6. (S/NF) Hassan Al Aumari is the most recent American citizen to be kidnapped, in July 2008; the family paid USD 30,000 for his release (the kidnappers originally demanded USD 250,000, but was reduced due to negotiations). The last American kidnapped and still held is Michael Chand, kidnapped August 17, 2007. Mr. Chand,s whereabouts are unknown and the interagency community continues to diligently pursue his safe recovery.

How OHA Evolved

¶7. (SBU) In response to a rapidly increasing number of

kidnappings, the Hostage Working Group (HWG) was created at U.S. Embassy Baghdad on an ad hoc basis in April 2004 in an effort to coordinate the U.S. government response to all hostage activities in Iraq. The continuing prevalence of incidents prompted the formalization of the HWG in November 2005 as a COM-led crisis management team comprised of DOS, DOD, and DOJ entities responsible for personnel recovery as outlined in NSPD-12 (United States Citizens Taken Hostage Abroad). In December 2006, the Office of Hostage Affairs was established as a permanent part of the Embassy staffing rather than a temporary working group.

¶8. (SBU) From April 2004 until August 2006, State Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT) personnel were deployed to fill the HWG positions. U.S. Army military reserve officers were deployed on six-month rotations to fill the Director billet beginning in September 2006 through April ¶2008. From May 2008 until present, Diplomatic Security has assigned a DS Agent to S/CT to fill the position as the Director of the Office of Hostage Affairs (OHA).

¶8. (SBU) According to the Kennedy report, OHA is structured to be comprised of two Foreign Service Officers. Presently, there are discussions underway between S/CT and Diplomatic Security (DS) about which bureau will provide the personnel to staff OHA,s Director position. The Deputy position will continue to be filled through 2009 by a contractor as it has has been since the inception of the HWG.

OHA,s Role and Structure

¶10. (S/REL TO USA, MCFI) The U.S. Ambassador to Iraq established the Office of Hostage Affairs to be the primary interface for providing an overview on all hostage matters to his office and senior State Department leadership. OHA is chartered to synchronize interagency collaboration through rapid information and intelligence sharing as well as facilitate diplomatic efforts for the safe and immediate recovery of hostages, and support the role of the Consular section in assisting U.S. citizens and their families.

¶11. (U) In support of the OHA charter, three pillars have

been defined for this mission: Prevention of future
incidents, Recovery of hostages and Justice for the hostage
takers.

¶12. (U) Prevention: OHA personnel provide monthly Hostage
Awareness Training (HAT) at U.S. Embassy Baghdad as well as
travel throughout Iraq to the 29 Regional Embassy Offices
(REOs), Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and Embedded
PRTs (EPRTs) to provide HAT training.   HAT training consists
of a one-hour briefing on the current threat environment,
common hostage taker tactics, how to reduce the risk of being
taken, how to increase chances of survival in the event of
being taken hostage, and a synopsis of USG efforts for
recovery. This training has also been provided to members of
the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), Broadcast
Board of Governors (BBG), media professionals, and security
corporations operating in Iraq.

¶13. (S/NF) OHA coordinates the conduct of specialized
training for the Diplomatic Security (DS) agents and
supporting contract staff responsible for the protection and
movement of COM personnel. This training is conducted by the
Air Force or Army Survival, Escape, Resistance, and Evasion
(SERE) specialists and includes High Risk of Isolation (HRI)
training and periodic briefings on the means and methods
Qtraining and periodic briefings on the means and methods
utilized by DOD to contact isolated individuals who are in
critical need of recovery assistance.

¶14. (S/NF) Recovery: Immediately upon notification of a
kidnapping incident, the Interagency is capable of sending
Combined Interagency Personnel Hostage Recovery (CIPHR) team
to the REO or PRT nearest to the site of the kidnapping to
assist the Battle Space commander in the hostage incident.
The CIPHR team is ordinarily comprised of FBI Agents and an
OHA representative; a military PR representative from MNF-I
is always invited.   The CIPHR team provides much needed
expertise in direct liaison between the family members of the
victim and the USG, as well as directs the negotiation and
follow-on investigation as appropriate. The CIPHR team lead
coordinates the recovery and acts as a conduit of information
between the MND and the elements at MNF-I and US Embassy.

¶15. (SBU) Additionally, OHA leads the interagency effort to
engage with Provincial and local police and elected officials

to elicit information regarding hostage cases through
one-on-one meetings and by addressing the District Advisory
Councils, as appropriate.

¶16. (S) Recovery operations, for the purpose of this cable,
can be categorized under two primary responses: hasty
(rescue) and deliberate (recovery). Hasty operations involve
a actions initiated from the initial report of abduction
until the time at which a) the military commander has
exercised all options and has no further recourse for an
immediate rescue, or b) the Crisis Action Team (CAT) reviews
an abduction report and determines that sufficient time has
passed since the individual has gone missing to negate the
positive results potentially gained by utilizing quick
reaction forces. Deliberate recovery responses include all
activities that extend beyond the period of a hasty rescue
response.

¶17. (S/NF) OHA coordinates closely with PRD for all military
involvement in response activities, whether hasty or
deliberate.   Hasty response activities aimed at an immediate
rescue are normally conducted by the respective
multi-national division (MND) commander where the hostage has
been reported missing.   Deliberate recovery operations,
which require development of intelligence targets and
investigative leads, are normally supported by the MNDs but
often times exceed their capacity for support due to other
on-going operational demands.   In certain cases, targeted
operations are executed by Task Force or CJSOTF elements.

Rescue attempts involving individuals under POI status have
been conducted previously in conjunction with Iraqi Special
Operations Forces (ISOF), under the supervision of CJSOTF,
and in coordination with the MND elements.

¶18. (S/NF) Justice: OHA supports the FBI and the Central
Criminal Court of Iraq (CCCI) in the pursuit of justice
against those involved in kidnapping.   Through sharing of
case information with US LNOs to the CCCI, OHA facilitates
the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators of kidnappings
against Americans, foreign nationals and Iraqi citizens. For
example, in July 2008, as permitted by Iraqi law in the case
of first-time convictions for kidnappers, the leader of the
kidnapping cell responsible for the kidnapping of the
Chaldean Archbishop received the death penalty for his
involvement in the crime.   OHA, CCCI, and the Chaldean
Church worked closely prior to the conviction to ensure the
investigative judge had all information available to conduct
a fair trial.

¶19. (C) One of the key responsibilities of OHA is
recommending to the Ambassador nominations for "Person of
Interest" (POI) status. A standing Interagency Memorandum of
Understanding for Personnel Recovery in Iraq allows for the
DCM to designate anyone outside of the current mandate as a
POI. This status is nominated through OHA to the DCM and
presented to the Commanding General MNF-I to request
interagency authority to utilize the full force of military
assets to recovery an individual. All American citizens, CF
military members, U.S. contractors, Diplomats, NATO, UN and
EU members will receive POI status. (Note: Current DoD
policy authorizes the utilization of all military assets to
recover DoD contractors or civilians accompanying the force,
but does not explicitly and directly address those Americans
not affiliated with DoD who thus fall outside the mandated
responsibility of DoD for recovery.   Augmenting MOAs and
Qresponsibility of DoD for recovery.   Augmenting MOAs and
MOUs have attempted to clarify this discrepancy, but changes
have not yet been reflected in policy changes. End Note.)

Iraqi Agencies, Role in Combating Hostage Taking

¶20. (SBU) The GOI organizations currently responsible for
hostage recovery in Iraq fall under two Ministries: Ministry
of Interior (MOI) for investigations and Ministry of Defense
for action or rescue operations.

¶21. (SBU) The Iraqi Police (IP), which fall under the MOI,
are responsible for responding to the initial report of a
kidnap event involving Iraqi citizens. If the local IP
station lacks capability or is inadequately staffed to
respond, the senior ranking member of the station may opt to
request assistance from the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC),
in Baghdad Province or, in outlying provinces, from the
Provincial Chief of Police. This, however, is not a commonly
exercised practice. More often than not the kidnapping is
resolved through tribal negotiations and payment of ransom by
the family.

¶22. (SBU) High profile kidnapping cases in Iraq, and the
majority of kidnapping cases in Baghdad, are handled by the
Ministry of Interior (MOI) Criminal Investigative Division
(CID). The primary interface to the MOI CID is the FBI Legal
Attache (Legat). In the event OHA receives a report of an
Iraqi citizen being kidnapped and the individual does not
receive POI status, the case is passed through the Legat to
the MOI CID for investigation and resolution.

¶23. (S/NF) The MOI CID has a special unit for rescue
operations involving kidnappings, the Emergency Response Unit
(ERU). The ERU has been plagued with problems of corruption
and political power plays and is not assessed by OHA to be a
fully-capable response or action arm at this time.

¶24. (S/NF) The MOD has developed an action arm capable of conducting recovery operations which falls under the CTB and is comprised of Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF), mentored and assisted by U.S. Special Forces Advisors.   The Interagency is established a good working relationship and is impressed with ISOF,s rescue capability which provides an Iraqi face to the force and is overseen by U.S. Special Forces advisors.

¶25. (S/NF) The GOI does not have a national policy office nor designated points of contact for international or domestic kidnapping matters, though the default contact in the past has been the National Security Advisor for high-profile and select international cases.   Without such an office, OHA has become the central point of contact for foreign governments, dignitaries, diplomats, and family members seeking resolution to the kidnapping of their citizens.   UNSCR 1511 allowed for the USG, through OHA, to provide recovery assistance to many of the aforementioned under the auspices of maintaining security and stability in Iraq.   As the UNSCR expires, USG ability to assist and respond will be markedly limited in scope; and the GOI still does not have the capacity to respond independently.

Interagency Personnel Recovery (PR) in Iraq

¶26. (S/REL TO USA, MCFI) JIAPRWG. The Joint Inter Agency Personnel Recovery Working Group (JIAPRWG) is the Embassy personnel recovery community forum for case coordination and information sharing. The JIAPRWG is comprised of multiple DOD and COM entities with responsibilities for intelligence, law enforcement, and political support to personnel recovery. The primary partners to OHA within the JIAPRWG are the FBI and the MNF-I Personnel Recovery Division (MNF-I CJ3 PRD). The JIAPRWG convenes a meeting bi-weekly to discuss current issues and review case developments.

¶27. (C) The FBI. OHA and the FBI coordinate daily regarding current American citizen cases. As legislated by NSPD-12, the FBI is the lead agency for all activities related to the collection of evidence, development and implementation of negotiation strategies, the conduct of investigations, and in conducting forensics as relates to the recovery of kidnapped American citizens abroad. The FBI advises the members of the JIAPRWG on current negotiation strategies and guides private negotiating parties concerning negotiation techniques as needed.

¶28. (C) The FBI hostage recovery efforts in Iraq are overseen by the Legat office and augmented by FBI Baghdad Operations Center (BOC) Hostage Working Group (HWG). The Legat works directly with the Iraq Ministry of Interior QLegat works directly with the Iraq Ministry of Interior Criminal Investigative Division (MOI CID). FBI Special Agents on temporary duty assignment to the BOC lead the investigative effort for resolution of American citizen cases.

¶29. (S/REL TO USA, MCFI) PRD. The Personnel Recovery Division (MNF-I CJ3 PRD) is OHA,s primary interface with DOD personnel recovery components.   PRD is the central repository for all intelligence information in Iraq regarding current and past hostage cases, and serves as the COM link to DOD hasty and deliberate recovery assets in the event of a kidnapping. Through the PRD, OHA is able to submit requests for intelligence information, obtain access to detainee interview reports, facilitate transfer of suspects from Iraqi to Coalition Forces custody, and coordinate targeted information operations campaigns aimed at those believed to have information regarding hostages or hostage takers. PRD is located at the Victory Base Complex adjacent to the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP).

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¶30. (S/REL TO USA, MCFI) Outside of PRD, the principle components of the military PR architecture in Iraq are the

USCENTCOM Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) in the
Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC), Al Udied Air Base
(AUAB); the MNC-I Personnel Recovery Coordination Center
(PRCC), Camp Victory, Iraq; Recovery Coordination Center
(RCC,s) at each Major Subordinate Command (MSC) throughout
the theater. The respective functions of each of these PR
nodes can be referenced in MNF-I Fragmentary Order 08-120.

¶31. (SBU) RSO. The Regional Security Office (RSO) supports
OHA efforts through the prioritization of air and ground
security assets in response to a kidnap incident. OHA works
closely with the RSO Intelligence and Investigations Unit on
a daily basis regarding threats to individuals, regional and
location specific threat assessments, as well as on
individual kidnap cases.

¶32. (SBU) Consular Affairs is responsible for notification
of an abduction or recovery to the family members of American
citizens through American Citizen Services (ACS). The
existing MOU between FBI and DOS requires that once an
investigation has been initiated into an American citizen
kidnapping, all interaction with the family will be
coordinated through the FBI,s Office of Victim's Assistance
(OVA) at FBI Headquarters.

¶33. (SBU) OPA. OHA coordinates with the Embassy's Office of
Provincial Affairs (OPA) prior to any travel to the PRTs and
EPRTs. OPA desk officers are able to provide atmospherics of
their region and assist in setting meetings with the
appropriate GOI members for specific engagements. OHA
personnel travel regularly to the PRTs and EPRTs to provide
HAT training, engage with local tribal and government
members, and as needed, to support newly reported hostage
cases.

¶34. (S/REL TO USA, MCFI) CCCI/TF134. The primary conduit
for information regarding detainees awaiting trial and the
prosecution of those involved in kidnapping cases is through
MNF-I's Task Force 134 (Detainee Operations) to the Central
Criminal Courts of Iraq. OHA works closely with TF134 LNOs
to support their prosecutorial efforts, as well as to obtain
additional information at the request of our interagency and
international partners.

¶35. (S/NF) OHA works with our Intelligence community
partners formulate approaches for engagements, develop
negotiation strategies in conjunction with the FBI, and
facilitate information collection in support of persistent
and new cases.

¶36. (SBU) The Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism
(S/CT) sets Department policy for hostage response worldwide
and provides oversight to the Office of Hostage Affairs for
all kidnap incidents in Iraq. Additionally S/CT represents
DOS equities at the NSC in regards to nation policy on
interagency activities during a hostage incident. The
Director of OHA currently reports to and receives operational
and program guidance from S/CT.

¶36. (SBU) The Diplomatic Security International Programs
Office of Special Projects (DS/IP/OSP) has recently been
given a greater purview for the training, prevention, and
response to kidnap incidents worldwide. This is an evolving
responsibility within DS IP/OSP, and currently incorporates
the Rewards For Justice program as well as oversight for
funding of information operations through the military
information support team (MIST).

Q
Major Challenges

¶38. (SBU) There are multiple challenges to locating,
recovering, and returning our kidnapped Americans to their
rightful homes, the most significant of which is the lack of
host nation law enforcement capacity to partner with for
response and investigative actions. This is compounded by
the tenuous security situation and non-permissive
environments in which investigations, site exploitations, and

travel must be conducted in order to obtain more information
and locate the hostages.   The high turnover rate of
personnel also contributes to the lack of corporate knowledge
and often times leads to interagency partners attempting a
second or third time to implement policies or procedures
which have been demonstrated as ineffective previously.

Exacerbating the entire situation is the minimal visibility
we have over how many Americans are currently in country,
where they are working or living, and the inability to assess
their current security profile.

Expectations for the Future

¶39. (SBU) The general security situation in Iraq has become
safer in recent months with a marked decrease in violence,
but that does not make the country altogether safe. As
stability, or the perception thereof, increases so will the
travel of softer target civilians throughout the country.
These individuals include businesspersons, tourists, NGOs,
and dual-nationality citizens returning for family visits,
who are not adhering to the security postures observed by the
majority of Americans present in Iraq over recent years. The
coinciding increased movement through unknown territories,
reduced security measures, continued need of criminal and
insurgent groups to finance their activities, and the tenuous
security situation has the very real potential of parlaying
into an increase of kidnappings in the future.

¶40. (SBU) Criminal elements are known to look for easy
targets of opportunity. Iraqi Americans returning to visit
their families or conduct business, NGO workers, those
starting new business ventures and tourists are particularly
vulnerable to this type of kidnapping.   The best mitigation
to this threat is to encourage increased personal security
awareness, and provide threat-specific training to
COM-affiliated personnel.

¶41. (S/NF) The Department does not have a reintegration
policy for American citizens recovered by the USG requiring
separation of the victim from the targeted area for a
specified duration. As such, once successfully recovered an
American citizen can return to the same hostile environment
from which he or she was taken, as was seen in the case of
Hassan Al Aumari. In the future this could mean repeated
recovery operations being conducted for the same individual.

¶42. (SBU) The Kurdistan region has seen a sharp increase in
the amount of tourism to its area. Although violence is far
lower in this region and development is expansive, this does
not mitigate the risk to tourists who are prone to go off the
beaten path, such as those who have been seen venturing into
the mountainous countryside. Open press recently reported
that a group of tourists, after their visit to the Kurdistan
region, hired their own Personnel Security Detail (PSD) to
travel to other parts of Iraq to visit the religious and
cultural sites. In a post-UNSCR environment such PSDs will
not be able to fight off an attack by kidnappers without
serious legal repercussions.

¶43. (S/REL TO USA, MCFI) Depending on the political
environment at any given time, the potential exists as
demonstrated by past events, for systematic targeting of
Iraqi and foreign dignitaries for kidnapping. Targeting
distinguished persons would significantly raise the stakes
with respect to political, diplomatic or economic
concessions. The GOI does not have the capacity to
adequately respond or assist the USG with such kidnap cases.

¶44. (SBU) Iraq requires a comprehensive approach to mitigate
the economic, social, and security impact of kidnapping.
This will require involvement and buy-in from the highest
levels of the GOI to stand up a dedicated hostage recovery
capability within the government. The entity responsible
Qcapability within the government. The entity responsible

needs to address lingering cultural indifference to kidnapping, prevention and threat mitigation for foreigners and Iraqi citizens alike, investigative resources, immediate response capabilities, and the requirement to see that hostage takers are beholden to Iraqi law. If this capacity is not built, kidnapping in Iraq will continue to be a serious threat to the rule of law in Iraq, undermining the faith of the Iraqi people in their government and their security forces.

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